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Statement of Chairman Jim Saxton
Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities

Subcommittee Hearing on the Military Housing Privatization Initiative

The Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities meets this morning to review the status of the effort by the Department of Defense and the military services to improve military family housing with a specific focus on the implementation of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative. Last week, the Subcommittee examined the effect of the poor condition of military infrastructure on the readiness of the armed forces and the quality of life for military personnel and their families. Across the military services, 36 of the 40 major commands or major claimants - 90 percent - reported the condition of the housing and community support facilities as C-3 or below. While a number of factors go into those ratings, clearly the condition of military housing is a major factor in those assessments.

I am gratified that the President and the Secretary of Defense have looked at this issue and pledged to improve the living and working conditions for those in uniform. The President has pledged to make an additional \$400 million in the coming budget submission available to support quality housing for those who volunteer service to the Nation. Clearly, there is a lot to do.

The Department of Defense reports that 180,000 military family housing units in the United States - roughly 60 percent of the inventory - are substandard. DOD estimates that fixing the problem with traditional military construction approaches alone could take as long as 30 years and cost nearly \$16 billion. In addition, housing for the single enlisted remains inadequate.

While the problem remains serious, we should also recognize where progress has been made. Improvements in the condition of permanent party barracks and dormitories for the single enlisted are underway. Congress has invested heavily in the last few years in this area and we need to keep these programs on track. At the same time, we need to turn our attention to the condition of trainee barracks, which remain quite poor. In the area of military family housing, through prudent and accelerated MILCON investment and through the limited use of the military housing privatization authorities, the number of inadequate military family housing units has dropped by roughly 38,000 since the Defense Science Board on Quality of Life reported their findings in October 1995.

Much of our focus today will be on the privatization of military family housing. Congress extended the existing authorities for this activity last year through December 31, 2004. At the same time, the military services are working toward a target of 2010 to resolve the problem of inadequate and substandard housing for military families. Privatization is part of that solution. The other part is continued support for traditional MILCON approaches where privatization is not feasible. Regretfully, both the Army and the Air Force will miss that target, based on current planning, by four and three years respectively.

This Subcommittee will continue to be a forceful advocate for the resolution of this problem. I firmly believe that the privatization program and MILCON funding both need to be accelerated. 2010 is a goal that we can - and should - meet.